

Message Text

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71

ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SCCT-01 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-02

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FM AMEMBASSY COLOMBO

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 4186

C O N F I D E N T I A L COLOMBO 473

E.O. 11652:GDS

TAGS: PINS, PINT, CE

SUBJECT: COMMUNAL INCIDENTS IN PUTTALAM

REF: COLOMBO 440

1. PUTTALAM AREA, SCENE OF MUSLIM-SINHASESE CLASHES DESCRIBED REFTEL HAS CALMED FOLLOWING ARMY AND POLICE DEPLOYMENT THERE. WE NOW UNDERSTAND THAT THERE HAVE BEEN NINE DEATHS, SIX BY POLICE FIRING.

2. DATT (WHO IS REPORTING SEPARATELY IN HIS CHANNELS) HAS HEARD OF ISOLATED DISTRUBANCES IN SEVERAL OTHER MUSLIM AREAS, ALL WITHIN FORTY MILES OF PUTTALAM TOWN. ARMED FORCES HAVE BEEN SENT THERE ALSO. WHILE GSL IS OBVIOUSLY CONCERNED ABOUT POSSIBILITY THAT DISTURBANCES MIGHT SPREAD BEYOND NORTHWEST SRI LANKA TO MORE POPULATED AREAS, WE HAVE NO EVIDENCE THAT THIS HAS OCCURRED.

3. GSL IMPOSED EMERGENCY REGULATIONS FEBRUARY 5 PROHIBITING PUBLICATION OF ANY MATERIAL FOSTERING COMMUNAL DISCORD OR GIVING INFORMATION ABOUT INCIDENTS OF COMMUNAL DISCORD OR SECESSIONIST AGITATIONS WITHOUT APPROVAL OF COMPETENT AUTHORITY. RUMORS SPREADING COMMUNAL HOSTILITY ARE ALSO PROHIBITED.

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4. ANOTHER REGULATION IMPOSED PROHIBITS TRANSPORT OF MORE THAN TWO PERSONS BY TRUCK INTO AREAS SPECIFIED BY PRIME MINISTER. THIS IS DEVICE TO PREVENT GROUPS OF TROUBLEMAKERS FLOCKING TO PUTTALAM TO CONTRIBUTE TO TENSION.

5. FOUR PROMINENT MEMBERS OF RULING SRI LANKA FREEDOM PARTY, TWO SINHALESE AND TWO MUSLIMS, AND INCLUDING TWO CABINET MEMBERS, FLEW TO PUTTALAM FEBRUARY 5 ON INVESTIGATORY AND GOODWILL MISSION.

6. COMMENT: WHILE TENSION IS NOT ABSENT AND POTENTIAL FOR FURTHER COMMUNAL VIOLENCE DOES EXIST, SITUATION SHOULD NOT BE EXAGGERATED. PRIME MINISTER BANDARANAIKE, WHO ENCOUNTERED PROBLEM AS SHE RETURNED FROM SOUTHEAST ASIA TRIP, INDICATED TO AMBASSADOR FEBRUARY 6 SHE DID NOT FEEL SECURITY FORCES HANDLED SITUATION PROMPTLY OR FIRMLY ENOUGH. RECALLING TAMIL-SINHALESE RIOTS IN 1958 SHE SAID SHE HAD TAKEN STRONG MEASURES TO PREVENT VIOLENCE FROM SPREADING TO OTHER AREAS. FROM PRESENT INDICATIONS GSL APPEARS ABLE TO CONTROL SITUATION.
VAN HOLLEN

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